

## **The Politics Behind the Representation of British ‘Raj’ in the Novel *A Passage to India* by E.M. Forster**

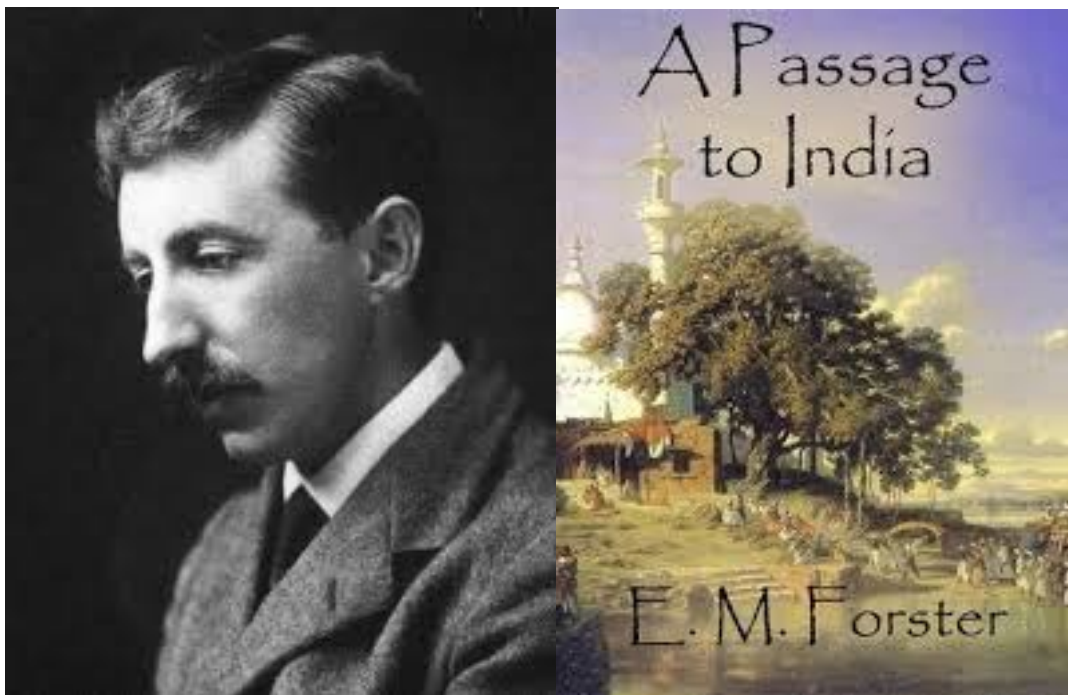
**Neethu Anna Tharakan**

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Mar Ivanios College (Autonomous), Nalanchira, Thiruvananthapuram* Email: [neethu.tharakan@mic.ac.in](mailto:neethu.tharakan@mic.ac.in)

### **Abstract**

*E.M Forster set on a voyage to discover the goodness in human life. He valued mutual trust, understanding and sympathy – the qualities hidden inside the human heart. He dedicated himself to the improvement of the essential human spirit. He was always busy finding the ‘human norm’. He always felt that life needs a proportion and no doubt his novels are excellent examples for this. A Passage to India is regarded as Forster’s greatest novel. In this work he criticizes the British rule in India. It is a profound statement about the conflicts faced by the colonizers and the colonized. Using symbolism, rhythm etc Forster evokes in us a real world. The novel sensitively traces the ups and downs of the relationship between the British and the Indians. My paper titled The Politics behind the Representation of British ‘Raj’ in the novel A Passage to India’ critically analyses the politics behind the use of the word ‘Raj’ along with the British. Is this possible? It’s all left to the readers to decide...*

**Key words:** Trust, human norm, ‘Raj’, colonizer, colonized.



“To Forster life is a mystery and not a muddle” quotes Neill. Forster always wanted to see the wholesomeness of life, a life filled with beauty, goodness, spirit evil etc. He believes that the essence of life is beyond the reach of human understanding, and moreover he was always busy finding the ‘human norm’. Forster always felt that life needed something more. He longed to see the essential essence of human understanding through his novels, and *A passage to India* clearly fulfils it. It made an everlasting mark in the literature of his age. It is a novel which is entirely different from his other works, since it dealt with the occupations the British ‘Raj’ in India, a kind of colonial domination that ended with the publication of this novel.

Through this novel Forster tries to criticize the British rule in India. They are not shown as devilish, but they are shown as people who failed to understand the Indian regions and cultures. British always had a stereotypical notion about India. Such notions have been passed from generations to generations and is still prevailing. They regard Indians as inferior, uncouth, incapable of leadership. Indian’s habits, customs, religious practices etc were regarded as not worthy of being civilized. But E.M. Forster in *A Passage to India* shows that the British tried to rule India in a just and right way. Some of the characters mentioned in the novel did not want the British to leave India. So what Forster tries is to give the image of two sides of the same coin.

The story of the novel is about the attempts made by two British ladies to understand the ‘real’ India. The story takes place primarily in Chandrapore, a city notable for the ‘Marabar Caves’ (Marabar Caves is another name for the Barabas caves situated near Gaya in North East India). In the novel, Forster describes the Marabar caves as something mysterious, a place where nobody can visit. A very little light penetrated the cave even at day light. For certain people, the Marabar caves are extraordinary. At the same time the place is not an uncanny. If it is so, it would be misleading. But something always appeared to be strange when people thought of the Marabar caves. In the novel, we see Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested sets out to discover the very heart of India, with the help of Dr. Aziz, a Muslim Doctor in Chandrapore. Both the ladies had a very good picture of India, so what they planned was to visit the very India. Since Mrs. Moore cannot accompany Adela she went alone, with Dr. Aziz and the guide. But the visit did not prove to be a happy one. Adela could not find her way out and at the same time she lost the company of a Dr. Aziz and the guide. When the group returned to Chandrapore Dr. Aziz was asserted for assaulting Adela.

If we scrutinize this story, we find a kind of complicated relationship between the British and the Indians. Forster when he visited India, witnessed the sufferings and helplessness of the Indian people at the hands of the British rule. To some people, the British were racist and to some others, they were not. Since there were varied opinions, Forster tries to remain an objective

observer of the British 'Raj'. He excellently portrays this objectivity in the novel as well. Forster provides a very good platform for the readers to create their own opinion about the dilemma faced by the characters in the novel. The narrator is in a foreign country working for a system that he despises. He is always surrounded by natives who did not respect him. Adela, although sympathetic towards Indians, she engages in a conflict with her own self. She hopes to follow her English boyfriend, but if she lies an innocent man will go to jail. If she tries to be honest, she will become a traitor to her own people.

At the surface level, the novel appears to be simple story, a tale of two countries, British and India. It moves forward with the help of a handful of characters both Indian and British. We witness these people travelling from England to India visiting mosques and other religious places. These people get fascinated by the mysterious Marabar caves. Forster opens before us a wide window so that we can view and understand the whereabouts, relationships and interactions of different kind of people. The essential life of the story is not what we think. The crust of the story lies in the broadened horizons of the language that is used to describe both England and India. Forster also emphasises repeatedly in this novel the worth of personal relationships. Many of the barriers are due to the rigid conventions and narrow prejudices shown by men with 'undeveloped hearts'. The strange sounds that was being heard from the Marabar caves echoes the conflicted self of both British and the Indians. At the same time Forster also suggest the fact that people can maintain a good cross- cultural relationships. Man can survive at a place where there is openness and understanding. Forster at the same time admires those people who are not surrounded by certain negative conventions and prejudices. He shows in case of Fielding and Ms Moore how persons of tolerance, good temper and sympathy can establish the sanctity and saintly of personal relationship in the face of hysteria shown by the British.

However, all the points mentioned above gives a romanticized vision of the relationship between the British (the colonizer) and the Indians (the colonized). But we people should think about the politics behind this romanticized vision. The novelist of course is satisfying the rule of British over India, concealing the fact that there were a lot of atrocities meted out towards the Indian community. People were strangled based on caste, race, sex etc. Insults and abuses were once showered to the native Indians. The Hindu- Muslim racial prejudices were fanned by the so called British 'Raj'. Great Indian leaders gave their life and blood for the protection of our lives. So, can we justify such rule? If we live in an utopic world then we can do so. No where we can find such an open relationship. Moreover, there exists a kind of politics in the use of the word 'Raj'. Raj means 'monarchs' or 'king'. And the very word 'Raj' comes only after the 'British' and not India. The British were the monarchs and the Indians were the people. So, can we justify the British rule? It's all left to the readers to think about the fact. The

novelist however depicts with sympathy and discernment the complicated oriental reaction about the British rule in India and reveals the conflict of temperament and tradition involved in that relationship.

**Explanations:**

Uncanny: It means an eerie atmosphere.

Utopic world: An imagined place or state of things where everything is perfect.

Oriental: It means countries of East and Southeast Asia. India is an oriental because India is in the Eastern hemisphere.

**References:**

1. Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953.
2. Chaudhuri, Nirad C. *Passage to and from India* Chennai: Macmillan India, 1992.
3. Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*, Marine Books, 1927.
4. Sing, Natwar E.M *Forster: A Tribute*. Rupa and Co., New Delhi, 2002.